

HIGHLAND AND WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

1 May 2014

Agenda Item	8
Report No	VAL 10/14

Departmental Report

Report by the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer

Summary

This report outlines the main business of the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer's department since the last meeting of the Board.

1. General

The main business of the department since the last meeting of the Board concerned the conclusion of the electoral canvass, finalising the electoral register for publication, preparation for both a by-election and the European election and continued planning for the introduction of individual electoral registration. Maintenance of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax List continued throughout the period. These matters are dealt with in greater detail below.

2. Electoral Registration

The revised register was published on 10 March. The overall return rate for the canvass indicated an improvement on previous years. A doorstep canvass has taken place, targeting long term non responders and other households where it was anticipated that the postal canvass would not yield a result. The canvass this year included an exercise to identify young voters who will be eligible to vote in the Scottish Independence Referendum. While this work is ongoing, indications at this stage suggest that a high level of registration has been achieved. Further work will be carried out in the forthcoming months to target those that may not have been registered thus far. This will include young people that have recently moved into the area.

One issue that has been raised concerns the method by which a young person may confirm that they have been included on the register. The difficulty arises because the Register of Young Voters is not open to inspection. While the eventual issue of polling cards will both confirm the position and also allow a window of opportunity to register, this will take place quite late in the process. Consideration is currently being given to writing to all young voters confirming their registration.

Preparations are in hand for the forthcoming European Election on 22 May. All non-UK European electors have been written to and asked whether they intend to vote here or in their native country. 2606 of these have indicated their intention to vote locally. Data has been provided to allow for the production of polling cards and these have now been delivered to electors and the first export of image files has been provided for loading into the Postal Vote Management System.

Prior to the European Elections, a by-election is scheduled for Ward 12 of the Highland Council on 1 May and all necessary information has been provided to the Returning Officer.

Preparatory work associated with the introduction of individual electoral registration continues. Key staff members have now attended training courses organised by the Cabinet Office and work is underway to cascade this information to the remaining staff by way of a number of training days. Further staff are scheduled to attend training in the use of the revised software systems in the forthcoming months. Once the specific capabilities of the revised software are known the requirement for any additional support will be clearer.

Work continues in co-operation with other ERO's with a view to co-ordinating publicity efforts to complement those of the Electoral Commission and to fill any gaps that are identified through joint ventures where appropriate.

Further testing is underway in conjunction with the Cabinet Office relating to the secure data links necessary for the confirmation run against Department of Work and Pensions Database in September.

The focus in the forthcoming months shall be the rolling out of staff training, further development and execution of the public engagement strategy and detailed planning for the data matching and consequential write-out.

3. Valuation for Rating

The period since the Board meeting in January has largely involved the necessary survey and valuation required to update the valuation roll prior to the financial year end.

There are two Valuation Appeal Hearings scheduled for non-domestic subjects. These hearings shall dispose of all appeals outstanding at the point of citation.

Maintenance of the Valuation Roll continues in an orderly fashion. While the end of year statistics indicate there has been a slight reduction in time related performance, efforts will be made to improve performance against this measure once the current appeal activity is concluded.

4. Council Tax

Maintenance of the Council Tax List continues as a matter of routine. The end of year statistics indicate that it has proven possible to maintain time related performance over the last year on slightly increased volumes. The level of appeal

in relation to Council Tax is minimal and the small number of outstanding appeals shall be disposed of at forthcoming Valuation Appeal Hearings.

5. Administration

The main administrative business has related to the provision of detailed plans for the implementation of IER and end of year financial reporting. Work is ongoing regarding the review of administrative policies and other issues of corporate governance. A number of revised policies are submitted for approval at this Board meeting and it is intended to submit additional updated policies at the next Board meeting in September.

6. Staffing

Following consultation with the Board's HR Adviser, two vacancies for trainee valuers were advertised internally. Selection interviews have taken place and two appointments have been made.

7. Recommendation

The Board is invited to note the recent activities of the department as set out in this report.

Designation: Assessor and ERO

Date: 22 April 2014

Author: William J Gillies, Assessor & ERO